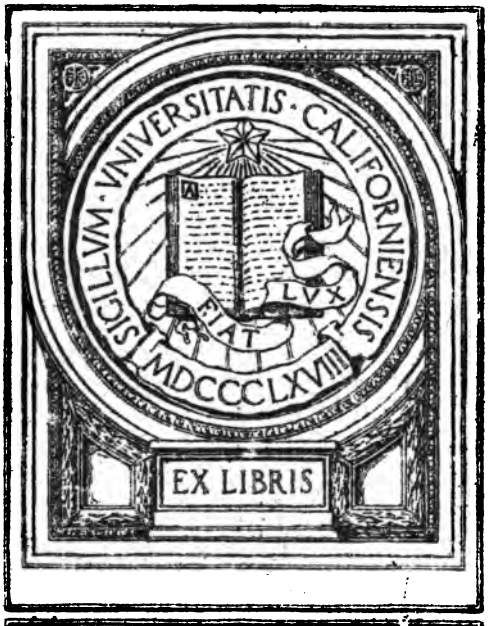
THE TOWN WHERE I WAS BORN



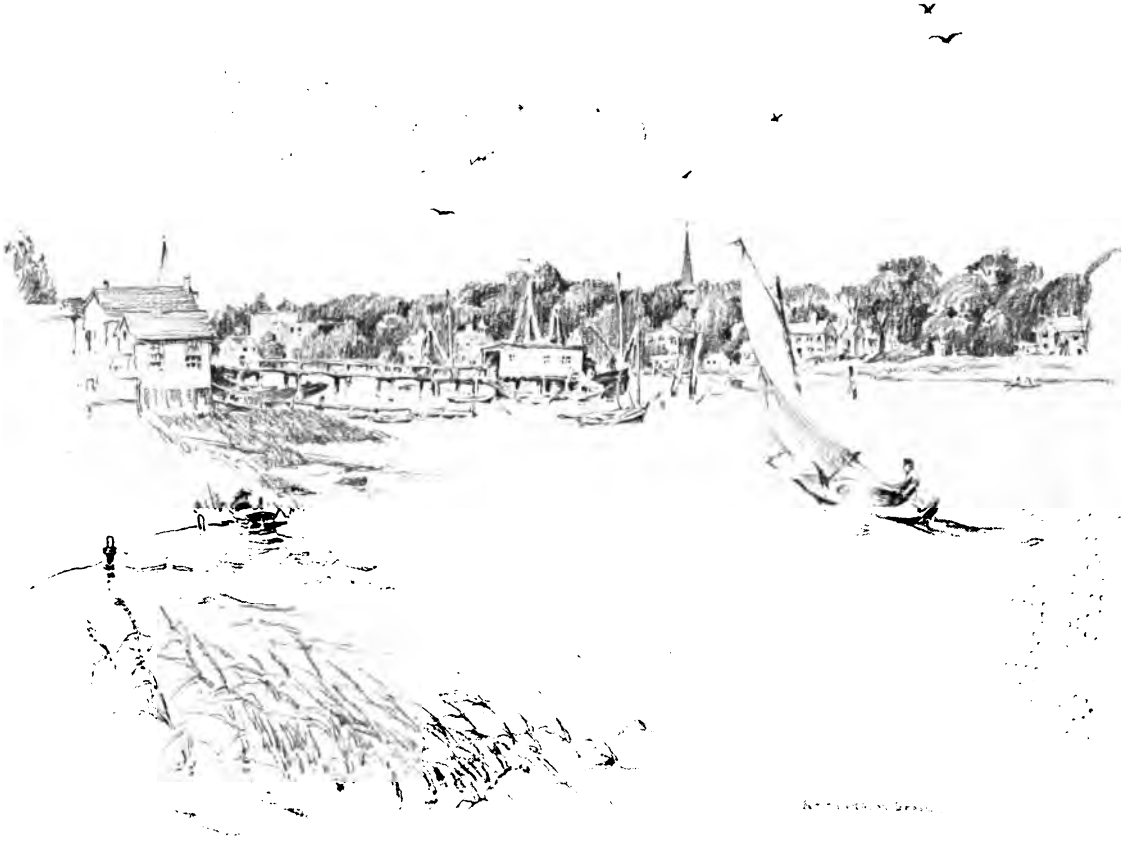
Christmas Greetings

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Baker

301 Bellefontaine Street

Benj: Ide Wheeler.

from Mr & Mrs William
C. Baker.



THE TOWN WHERE I WAS BORN

STORIES *of* OLD WICKFORD

By

W. C. B.

TOLD IN RHYME

By

S. M. B.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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PASADENA · CALIFORNIA

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Preface

As when a school boy turns his pockets out
Finding new pleasure in forgotten things—
A copper penny to make bright,
Tops, marbles, fish hooks, bits of strings,—
So, fumbling in the corners of my mind
Old memories like re-discovered treasure
Full of Life's trivial happenings
Awake to bring forth pain and pleasure.

The Town Where I Was Born

Its just a quiet little town
The town where I was born,
With great elms shading the long streets
And grimy wharves where fishing fleets
Go forth at break of dawn.

And simple folk dwell in the town
The town where I was born,
Sea-faring men with faces brown
Whistling as they go up and down
Make music in the morn.

And in and out around the town
This town where I was born,
The bay slips up through reedy creeks
Where many a tired wild fowl seeks
Rest from its flight forlorn.

Up on the hill in this old town
The town where I was born,
The 'Cademy is standing still,
And on its fence the whippoorwill
Still chants his note of scorn.

Oh, happy days in the old town
The town where I was born,
Then every neighbor was a friend,
My heart will cherish to the end
These leaves from memory torn.

Hen'n Me

Onct on a time long while ago
When I wuz jest a kid,
I gotter skeer and say, you know,
I hollered some I did.
Hen Gardner'n me wuz settin round
Old Uncle Asa's store,
A listening to the tales they told
Them old sea cap'ns four.
Cap'n Jim 'n Cap'n Ben
An' Cap'n Hardy too
Wuz sorter clustered roun the fire
Talkin to Cap'n Blue.
We kinder hoped ef we fussed round
Old Uncle Asa'd say
"Here boys, jest take these pepmint sticks
An' then git out the way."
So sure enuf when it got dark
He looked at us an said
"Come boys you'd better git along,
Time youngsters wuz in bed."

Hen Gardner he piped up an said
Please gimme a stick o' candy,
An' Billy here thinks one of' them
Jawbreakers'd come in handy."
Well Uncle Asa laughed an lit
The one old whale oil lamp,
It shone right on a puddle when
We stepped out in the damp.
'N Hen says "Aw, don't let's go home,

Let's hide behind the boxes,"
So we crept in at the back door
Ez sly ez little foxes.
The folks wuz talkin about ha'nts
An' how they wuz deceivin',
But Uncle Asa said fer him
Why seein' wuz believin'.
'N Cap'n Hardy 'lowed ez how
He'd seen a ship load of 'em,
With inky blackness all around
An' fiery skies above 'em.
He said ez you could almost hear
The men an women screamin,
Cos pirates hed the ship, an all
The decks with blood wuz streamin.
'Twus over in Long Island Sound
This dretful sight he seen,
An' all the neighbors far and near
Called it the "Palatine."
Well, Hen'n me begun to feel
Not quite up to the mark,
We'd liked to skin out but wuz skeered
To go home in the dark.

So there we set, an' Cap'n Jim
Said that wuz jest a pleasure
Beside the story HE could tell
Of huntin' fer Kidd's treasure.
He said ez how one stormy night
Blind Jerry Wells an' he
Went over to Plum Island beach
To dig for gold monee.
For everybody knew 'twas there,

An' how old Cap'n Kidd
Had cut three Injuns' head right off
An' laid 'em on the lid
Of the strong box that held the gold,
And if you made a sound,
Them Injuns would rise up an run
To seize what you had found.
So he'n Jerry dug away
'N pretty soon they struck it,
They started in to lift the box
But jest before they tuck it
Blind Jerry swore because in haste
He hit his knee an' stumbled,
The very instant that he spoke
The chest to dust hed crumbled.
An' Cap'n Jim he saw the ghosts
Of those three Injun braves,
Rise up 'n snatch their gory heads
From out their sandy graves.
But jest ez he got to that part
Hen let out such a shriek
That all hands jumped 'n Cap'n Blue,
Why he swore a *blue* streak.
But we wuz blubbering then you bet,
An' Uncle Asa told us
That jest to calm us down a mite
He'd set a spell an hold us.
So when he'd got us straightened out
We started home agin,
Hen lived right across the street,
So he got safely in.
An' then I started down the road
Ez fast ez you could fiddle,

Aunt Sukey Brown wuz comin up,
I hit her in the middle,
My! how she yelled! an ez for me
I up and gave her room quick,
For I wuz sure she wuz a witch
A ridin on a broom-stick.
An' when I got to my back door,
I tell you I wuz hummin';
I jest hung blubbering on the latch,
But Ma she heard me comin;
An' so she takes me in an' shuts
The kitchen door behind me,
An' wraps her apron round me so
The bogie man can't find me.
An' then she laughed 'n said I wuz
A precious little silly.
I kinder liked it when she called
Me "blessed little Billy."

Joy Ridin' in the Hearse

There wuz jest one hearse in the hull town
An' so, lackin' in competition,
It grew kinder rusty an' run down
Till it wan't in reel good condition.
In the school house shed it useter stand
Lookin' so big an' so black an' grand
With its pampas plumes a-wavin',
Thet most folks felt a sort of awe
An' all the girls would say "Oh law!
No ride in thet am I cravin'."

But us boys useter take it out,
Plumb up to the top o' the hill,
An' then with youngsters thin an' stout
The corpse's place we would fill,
Then "let her go Gallighar," lickety cut;
The plaguey old door it would never stay shut
An' the axles went a creakin',
But over the bumpers we rattled an shook,
An' all of the neighbors would run out to look
When they heard us come a shriekin'.

I bet ef the fellers who took their last ride
In thet cart we sent a spinnin',
Could hev seen us a reelin' from side to side
Thet they would a died a grinnin'.
An' when we got to the foot of the hill
There wuz apt to be a bit of a spill,
Bruises, but nothing worse,
I've hed excitement sence in my day,
But nothin' to equal thet far away
Joy Ridin' in the Hearse!

The Lonesome Man

A lonesome man once came to town
(This by his own confession)
He was a carpenter by trade,
A preacher by profession.

Such was his zeal he preached in air
While sawing wood on Monday
And sawed in air while preaching to
Good folks in church on Sunday.

At "firstly", off his necktie came,
At "secondly" his collar,
"Thirdly" removed his coat and vest
And he began to holler.

But neither work nor piety
Sufficed his soul to fill,
This preacher man was lonesome,
So he courted with a will.

Now Rhody Baker was the maid
On whom his yearnings tarried,
But she had vowed a solemn vow
She never would get married.

He hoped that he could change her mind,
So sought her dwelling daily,
But if she heard him at the door
She'd run away most gaily.

Her rocking chair still swaying showed
She'd left it but a minute,
But he could never chance to find
The chair with Rhody in it.

Now between whiles this preacher man
Was building him a dory,
And he bethought him that it's name
Might help to tell the story.

So in big letters on the stern
He painted "Rhody" boldly,
That very day he caught the lass,
But she received him coldly.

And when he asked her to be his
She said she really couldn't,
Back to his boat he went again
And named it "Rhody wouldn't."

Thanksgiving

When Mother pulled the table out
And fetched the gilt-edged china,
We children thought no royal feast
Could possibly look finer.

Then all the house was fragrant with
The swell of turkey cooking;
Aunt Betsy told us not to peek,
But we kept on a looking.

For oh, the pantry was a sight
Most luscious to discover,
With cakes and pies and tarts both ways—
With, and without a cover.

Benny cracked nuts, and Abby rubbed
Red apples till they shone,
I whipped up cream so white and stiff
That it could stand alone.

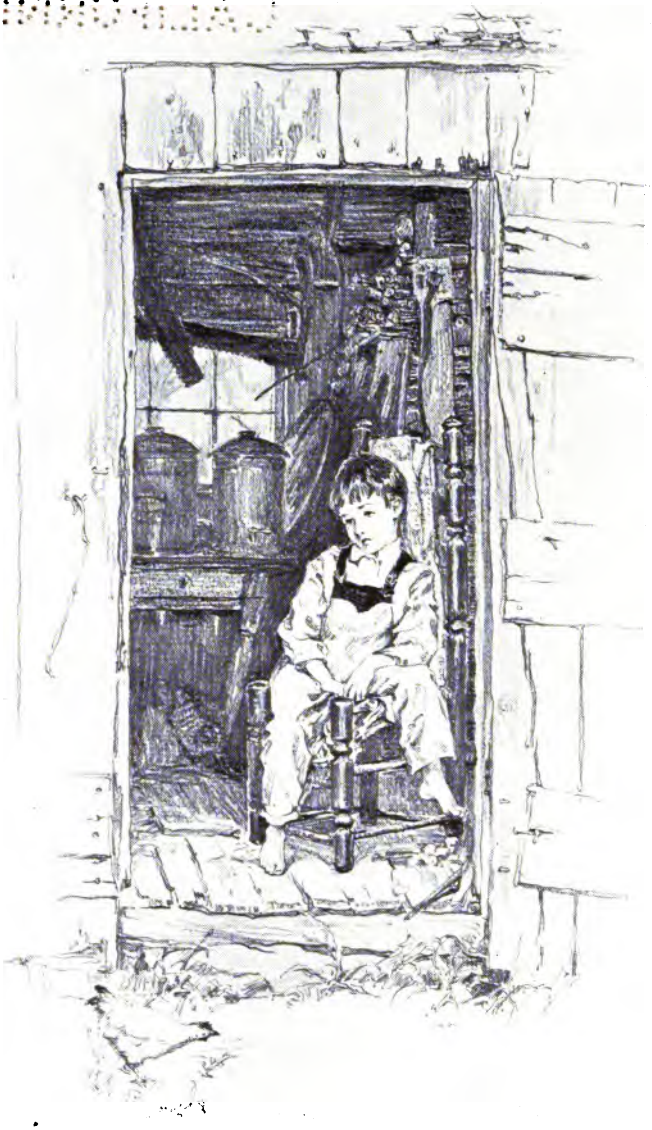
And when at last both young and old
Were gathered round the table,
Each girl and boy resolved to eat
As much as they were able.

Then Father stood up at the head
With gentle, smiling face,
To ask that all the bounty spread
Might have the dear Lord's grace.

The way he said "Our Father"
Made me feel when I was seven,
That he meant Grand-Pa who had died
And gone to live in Heaven.

So near and close the presence came
Through words that he let fall—
"Dear Father, bless us every one,
The little ones and all."

How often through the years now gone,
At banquets grand and fine,
I've heard those words and longed once more
For days of "Auld Lang Syne."



Helen Mason Grose.

In the Wood Shed

Ma' gen'ly calls me her little Billy,
But tonight it's dest old *Bill,*
An' she left me here in 'er shed alone
An' told me I gotter stay still.

Tain't fair! I wuz tryin' to be good,
An' spechully perlite
To all ze sewin' circle folks,
Wen old Miss Susan White

Sez "Willy, wat you thinkin' 'bout,
Sittin' so quiet there?"
An' everybody stopped to look
At me in my small chair.

An' I sez *orfully* perlite,
"I'm wishin' hard, Miss Sue,
When I grow up zat I can have
A moustache dest like you."

An' all ze sewin' ladies laughed
An' shook zemselves until
Ze tears rolled down into zere laps,
But Ma—she called me Bill,

An' said I'd gotter have my tea
Along er colored Mabel,
Ze hired girl, and couldn't come
To eat at ze first table.

An' zeres chicken 'n ham 'n five kinds o' cake,
An' biscuit 'n chocolate 'n tea,
An' everybody's eatin' now,
Everybody but me.

An' I feel all gone in my insides,
'Cause I ain't et nothin' since noon
'Cept three slices er bread 'n a piece er pie.
I guess I shall die pretty soon.

But all zose mean folks eatin' zere
Zat chicken wat Ma is carvin'
Are dest so cruel—Zey don't care a bit
For a poor little boy who is starvin'.

But when zey finds me deaded up,
I kinder guess Ma will
Be orful sorry she acted so
An' zat she called me *Bill.*

Gettin' Religion

All the folks are gettin' religion
Because salvation's free;
But things that I don't pay for
Ain't much use to me.

The other night in meetin',
Follerin' his natteral bent,
Old Bascom shouted "Come git grace,
'T'wont cost a single cent."

An' I riz up and answered,
"Lord, save your stingy soul,
Your kind o' grace ain't fit to tech,
Not with a ten foot pole.

"Our Christ sweat blood," sez I, "to earn
The right to say 'Amen,
Thy will, not mine, oh Lord, be done.'
Grace came not easy then."

"The peace o' God," sez I, "don't come
Through prayer and idle sittin',
But doin' what we think is right.
What's worth havin's worth the gittin'."

No! I ain't got religion,
Though nearly all my days
I've done the very best I could
To foller in His ways.

A Sufficient Reason

Joe Perkins had more children
Than any man in town,
He likewise had less money
And his house was tumbling down.

The neighbors held some sewing bees
To make his children clothing;
For ragged, dirty imps they were,
Objects of righteous loathing.

Fourteen there were by careful count,
And likely to be more;
He had not chairs enough for all,
So some sat on the floor.

Not one of them could read or write,
And work they simply wouldn't;
They didn't do a thing they should,
But everything they shouldn't.

Old Doctor Shaw once said to Joe,
"Why have so many of 'em?"
Joe scratched his head and made reply,
"B'gosh, because I love 'em!"

The Theft of a Church

There have been strange thefts since the world began,
An apple once caused the fall of man,
And all of Greece and Troy
Was plunged into war because Paris stole
The beautiful woman who pleased his soul
And filled his life with joy.

The diamond necklace of a Queen
Was a robbery bold as ever was seen,
But though history you search,
Who ever heard of a thing so queer,
Look where you will both far and near,
As the theft of a country church.

But it happened once in the early days,
That the people who came from various ways
To a church of some repute
To hear Berkeley preach and McSparren pray,
Soon found to their infinite dismay,
Themselves in hot dispute.

The withdrawing Elders, stern and strong,
Decided to take the church along,
No matter what others might say.
So they carted it off up hill and down,
Till they landed it safe in the old town,
Where it stands at the present day.

For all the brethren who were left
Of a place for worship thus bereft,
Much sympathy we feel;
But we chuckle at those who took the toll,
Each praying there with impenitent soul
In the church he had helped to steal.

Jest Like Ma

Ma Allen lived at the foot of the hill,
She knew when a neighbor chanced to be ill
And what made the babies cry;
And everything she didn't know
She sort of suspicioned *might* be so,
Cause why?

Cause she was lonesome and sat all day
Rocking and knitting and talking away,
Dressed up in her black lace mitts.
She had a cat, but he roamed afar,
Some chickens, too—and then she had Pa—
But Pa had fits.

Of course poor Pa was quite a care,
For he had his fits most anywhere,
And his wits were never about him;
Ma used to weep and say it was true
He wore on her but what *could* she do
Without him!

And so she sat and rocked away,
Talking to Pa the livelong day
Of all the town affairs;
How Sairy Hull's new dress was blue
And Eben Proughty's Cousin Sue
Hed put on airs.

At last, as often happens, Ma
Got worn out taking care of Pa,
And so at sixty-seven,
Although she never meant to flout him,
She found that she *could* live without him
In Heaven.

Pa grieved so when she went away
That a good neighbor came one day
And brought him in a Parrot,
A beautiful bird of green and red
With a hooked beak and a ruffled head
Of Carrot.

And dear me how that bird could chatter,
But talking didn't seem to matter,
It sounded good to Pa;
'Twas just as if a friend he'd found,
He'd smile and say "Now don't that sound
Jest like Ma?"

Plenty to Do

City feller here the other day,
Sailing with me across the bay.
"Cap'n," sez he, "it's surely prime
Down here in the good old summer time,
But when the wintry breezes blow
'Pears like it must be doocid slow.
Cap'n," sez he, "now tell me true,
What do you do?"

"Young feller," sez I, "to tell ye true,
Thar's jest two things I allus do,
Perhaps it mought seem rayther slow
To folks as allus wants to go,
But while you fellers air eatin' an' drinkin',
An' givin' an' gettin',
I'm settin' an' thinkin',
Waal, sometimes—jest settin'."

Selon Mason Grose

Hannah

Grey as the mist that comes creeping
In from the far distant bays,
A lonely house stands, keeping
Its memories of vanished days.
Murmuring like an empty shell
Held close to the listening ear,
Its brooding walls might softly tell
The secret of many a year.
And the story which lingers and echoes there
Is of Hannah's love and Hannah's despair.

Hannah, the pride of counties three;
Hannah, the darling of her sire,
No maid in all the South Countrie
Rode gaily in such rich attire.
When she tripped down the oaken stair
In silk and lace, with jeweled fan,
A rosebud glowing against her hair,
She stirred the heart of many a man.
And her own proud wilful heart was set
On the man her father bade her forget.

The lilacs yet stand whose purple bloom
Bent fragrant and wet above her
When she crept one night through the misty gloom
To meet her Tory lover.
Next morning she rode through the swinging gate,
Eyeing her groom with haughty air;
At a turn in the road she bade him wait
Till she should return to find him there.
Then alone she galloped up hill and down,
To wed her lover in Boston town.

All summer the Squire sat alone
In the house now grown so strangely still,
While crickets in dreary monotone
Chirped "Hannah" back to the Whip-poor-will.
All winter beside the great hearth fire
He waited in vain for a voice at the door,
His restless feet that knew no tire,
Went back and forth on the creaking floor.
And the north wind shaking the window pane
Shrieked "Hannah, Hannah," far down the lane.

The air grew soft with promise of Spring,
And the lilacs shed their perfume sweet
Over one who crouched, a broken thing,
Ragged of dress and weary of feet.
With lips a-quiver and heart aflame,
Her father bent over her there,
Murmuring her well beloved name,
He bore her up the winding stair
To the dainty room of rose and grey,
Whose mullioned windows looked toward the bay.

Woefully sad was the story told
While she tossed and moaned with fevered brain,
And her father's face grew grey and old
As she called her lover again and again.
With promises fair he had sailed away
To his English home beyond the sea.
She had waited in vain a year and a day
Ere she sought again the old roof-tree.
Ah, faithless lover who never came!
Her's was the sorrow and your's the shame!

Then she who had ridden forth in pride
On that fair morn one year before,
Came back on foot through the country side,
Begging her way from door to door.
Still hoping and loving with loyal trust,
She cried aloud as her end drew nigh,
"I know he will come, but if die I must,
Under the lilacs, oh let me lie.
Some day he will ride from out the mist
And I shall be there to keep the tryst."

Grey as the mist that comes creeping
In from the far distant bays,
The lonely house stands keeping
Its memories of vanished days.
And whenever the fields awaken,
When lilacs bloom in the lane,
By that grave so long forsaken,
The story is told again.
Then children and lovers whispering there,
Tell of Hannah's love and Hannah's despair.

Joe Perkinses Lad

Betcher can't guess what I got
Nor who 'twas give it ter me.
'Taint any old knife nor a pup—
No Sirree.
Yesterday noon I wuz down
On the dock'n Cap'n Ben
Came in on his sloop and when
He seed me, sez he,
"Ain't you Joe Perkinses' lad?"
An' he give this ter me.
He's the grandest man in town,
An' the best friend I ever had.

It's a whole new dollar bill,
An' I'm goin' ter keep it until
I git three or four,
Nuff ter set up a store,
An' then I'll git rich
An' mebby, some day,
Cap'n Ben he'll be poor,
An' I'll hitch up a sleigh
To drive ter his door
Full o' good things to eat,
Lots of flour an' meat,
An' he'll be all trimbly and old
Standin' there at the door in the cold,
An' he'll be s'prised an' say
"Now who be you anyway?"
An' I'll say "I'm Joe Perkinses' lad
An' you're the best friend ever I had."

Parson Jim's Dilemma

The old church wanted a parson bad,
But it seemed as if there was none to be had;
For the salary certainly wasn't big,
Fifty dollars a year with a cow and a pig,
And a tumble down house, deny it who can,
Is little enough for the average man.
And yet they expected—for folks are so queer,—
Much learning and virtue for fifty a year.
So if into debt he would keep from falling,
The man who was called must have other calling.

And so when a godly blacksmith was found
Who made the old church's rafters resound
As he pounded his fist on the pulpit's rim,
The call and election was surely for him.
There wasn't much that he couldn't do
From driving a horse to mending a shoe.
He could sail, he could fish, he could lay a stone wall,
And he knew the whole truth about old Adam's fall.
Had a beautiful manner, so soft and polite,
Kind spoken to children—the ladies' delight.
But two things came hard to good Parson Jim,
They were writing a sermon and singing a hymn.
At the singing he surely put up a good bluff,
Kept working his mouth, and looked solemn enough
To be Bispham himself or Enrico Caruso
When he hoisted his chest and pompously blew so,
But sermons he certainly could not write,
Though he studied the Bible and worked all night;
So like a wise fellow he borrowed his text,

His discourse as well, from one week to the next.
Sometimes it was Spurgeon and sometimes 'twas Beecher,
He read straight from every eloquent preacher,
And never concealed the fact that he took
His sermon from some quite neatly bound book.
But one of the deacons begrudged him his glory
And thought that he ought to preach extem*p*ore;
Said "twant orthodox, preachin' thet sort of way,
Nor scriptural nuther, if *he* had his way,
Direct inspiration wuz what he should ask for,
An' the minister ought to be taken to task for
Readin' them sermons as wasn't his own,
Let Spurgeon be hanged and Beecher be blown."

But Parson Jim serenely kept the tenor of his ways,
Till rising once in church to lead an hour of prayer and
praise,
His gaze upon the deacon fell who sat there full in view,
Holding the Boston Herald up and reading in his pew.
The Parson coughed ahem! and whispered "Brother Snow,
Please put that worldly paper up, it is not seemly so."
No answer from the Deacon came, and flustered Parson
Jim
Forsook the text and said ahem! they'd sing another hymn.
The hymn was sung, but still old Snow
Rustled his paper to and fro.
The Parson, leaning from his perch,
Said "Brother, please not read in church."
The Deacon shouted from his pew,
"Why can't I read as well as you?"

When the Jail Burned Down

The biggest excitement ever in town
Was when the old wooden jail burned down;
'Twas along in the fall—a frosty night—
And there wasn't a living soul in sight,
For the boys were all at a fancy ball
That the Lodge was giving in Woodman's Hall.
Sol Smith, the chief of the fire brigade,
Was dancing there with an Indian maid.
He was dressed like Old Nick with horns and a tail,
And a parcel of imps like a covey of quail
Was prancing and squealing around him there
When the clangor of fire bells filled the air.
Sol started away with the imps at his heel,
Leaving right in the midst of Virginia Reel.
It didn't take long to reach the jail,
Seize hook and ladder and iron pail
And work like the Devil he looked to be,
For nobody ever was quicker than he.
Now it chanced that the fire was set by a lamp
Overturned in his sleep by a drunken tramp
Who woke to find his cell in a blaze,
And saw, to his horrified amaze,
The devil himself in the midst of flame
With attendant imps whom he called by name.
"The Old Boy has got me," he cried with a yell,
"At last I have died and gone to"—well,
It doesn't matter what else he said,
For much that he uttered shouldn't be read.
But it's worth recording that after that fright
He never got drunk again—*at night.*

The Village Fool

When the slow Spring came down to town,
Touching the grass to quicker green,
When buds swelled on the Elm trees brown
And Johnny Jump Ups' heads were seen.

Then busy house-wives flung the windows wide
To thrust out Winter and let in the May,
Small blame to husbands if the ebbing tide
Made good excuse for ling'ring on the Bay.

Attic and cellar yielded up their stores
Of ancient feather beds and musty tins,
Carpets were lifted from the painted floors
And ashes carted from the dusty bins.

Then fields were ploughed, and anxious men
Toiled through the day with dreary eyes
That saw the clods, but knew not when
They missed the glory of the skies.

What though the Springtime called and Robins sang!
One ear alone in all the busy town
Heard the glad summons that through dim woods rang,
And caught the echoes as they floated down.

One only had the wisdom then
To turn his back on sordid care
And sing aloud through wood and glen
With joy because the day was fair.

Shambling through lanes and roaming far afield,
The Village Idiot went straying,
He knew the healing that each herb might yield,
He knew where speckled trout were playing.

Secrets were his than saner folk
Could never learn in any school,
To him each bee and bluebird spoke,
He shared their joy—oh Happy Fool!

Sandy versus Summer

I met up wi' Summer a coming down the Pike,
Sure I did, Missis, I'm telling of you true;
She caught me by the foot as nimble as could be,
Saying, "Come along, Sandy, come and play wi' me."
Dearie, me ma'am I never saw her like,
Knew it wouldn't please you—but what could I do?

So I goed wi' her ma'am across the fields so green,
Never thought of chores at home but just went along,
She took me to a sparrow's nest not so far away—
Three speckled eggs and the bird on them all day,—
'Bout the prettiest nest that Sandy ever seen;
And that little sparrow it had a kinky song.

Yes, Missis, *Kinky,* just like a little vine,
She sort of twined it all about the nest;
Guess when eggs are hatched the baby birds will sing
Same little ripply notes from underneath the wing;
Guess she'll like to hear 'em—would if they were mine,
Know she'll like to feel 'em underneath her breast.

Then Sandy followed Summer way across the lot,
Down through the orchard and over a stone wall,
Came to where a brook was twistin' in and out,
Had a fish-line wi' me and caught a mess o' trout,
Here they be, missis, everyone I got,
Fry 'em wi' bacon, they won't taste bad at all.

Brook, it kept a talkin' and a coaxin' Sandy,
Never could say "no" when brooks begin to talk,
When it gurgles so and sputters over stones
Seems just like the water had real friendly tones.
So I went in wadin', 'cause it seemed so handy,
Lots o' sun to dry my feet and make 'em white as chalk.

Brook and I went roamin' on down to a big pool,
Pussy Willows growin' all around the edge,
Found some Blue Flag missis—knew you liked to chew it,
Found some Boneset too, ma'am—thought you'd like to
brew it.
Sandy knows a thing or two if he is a fool,
Picked some tansy, too, a-growin' on the ledge.

"Tansy won't feed horses, or Boneset milk the cow?"
Ha-ha, Missis, Sandy knows that, too.
"Doesn't I feel just a good bit ashamed?"
Why, Missis, it's *summer* as ought to be blamed,
I *tried* to say "No," but I couldn't somehow,
She coaxed me so, ma'am, what else could I do?

The Village Liar

Poor Annanias! he hed to die
For jest one ornery little lie
Thet any damn fool could a told,
There ain't a land-agent livin' today
Thet wouldn't a beaten him far an' away
On every passel he sold.

Takes 'magination an jedgment to make a good liar,
An' neither he nor his wife Sapphira
Seem to hev hed the gift;
Ef they could a hung around the door
Of Uncle Asa's corner store
'Twould a given 'em quite a lift.

It certainly did beat all consarn
To hear old Eben Proughty yarn—
'Twas a liberal eddication
The way he'd talk about things he done,
Hosses he'd swapped and risks he'd run
With doctors and medication.

Eben certainly would a made a good preacher,
Or mebbe a lawyer or some kind o' teacher,
His lyin' was easy an' glib;
Led up to what he wanted to say
In such a plausible kind o' way
That you never suspected a fib.

I reck'lect well one August day,
Thunder caps hanging over the bay
And growlin' to beat the band,
We sat with our tongues just hangin' out
And every feller thet chanced to be stout
Hed a palm leaf fan in his hand.

There warn't a collar in all the crowd,
Nor a waist-coat neither, for we wan't proud,
And 'twas everlastin' hot;
And Sol Smith said, ez he wiped his brow,
"Ef I hed a melon here right now
I'd eat it ez like ez not."

"Watermelon?" sez Eben kinder slow,
"I bet you fellers don't reely know
How good a melon kin be.
Old Farmer Brown up Stony Lane
Hed melons—well, say! it gives me a pain
To think of 'em—yes, sirree!

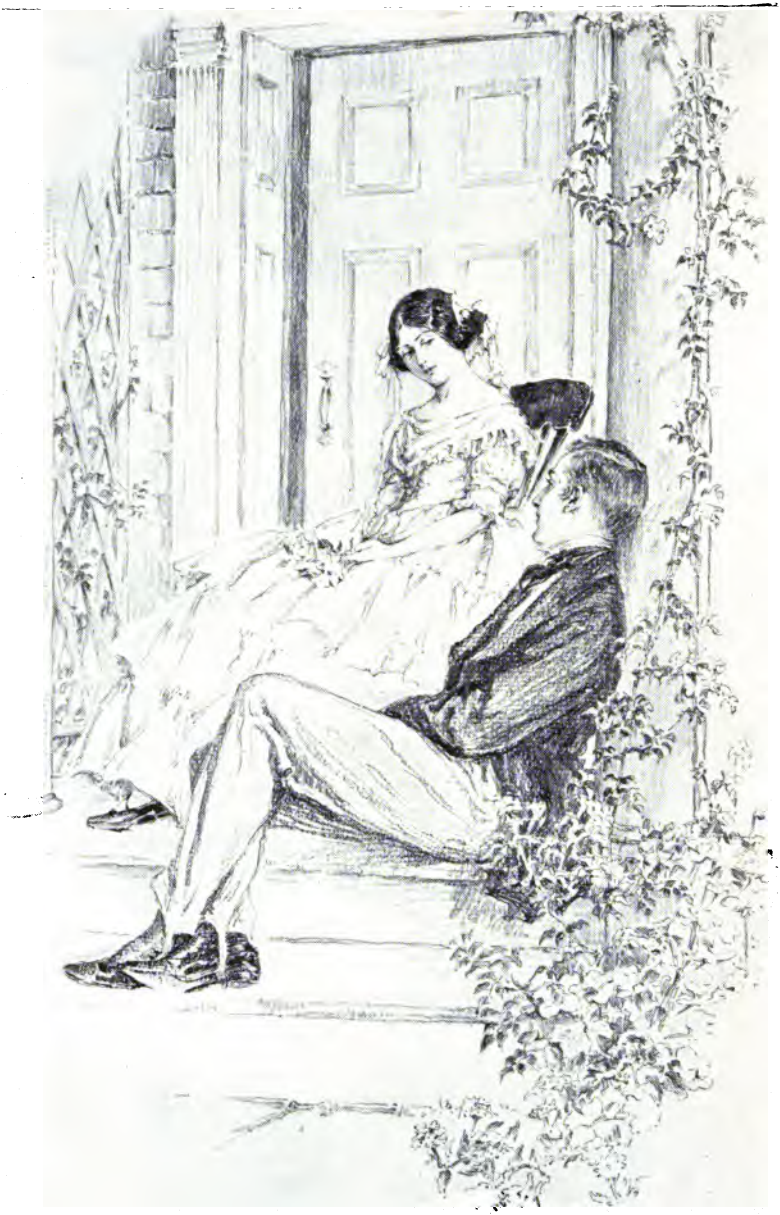
When I was a youngster, to save my soul,
I couldn't eat melon except it was stole,
And one blisterin' day in September
I climbed into old Brown's melon patch,
Tore my trousers and got a scratch
On the picket fence, I remember.

I searched around for the biggest one,
But jest as I started to hev some fun,
I heard old Brown behind me
Callin' his bulldog—"Sick him, Towser!
Catch him behind in the full o' the trouser;
Sick him, old dog, now mind me."

I hed a melon hugged to my chest,
And when the old dog came abreast
I threw it over the wall,
And jest as I was gittin' there too,
Towser got hold o' the heel of my shoe,
But he didn't hurt me at all.

And say! that melon was surely nice,
Sweet as sugar and *cold* as *ice*.
My! I wish that I hed it now."
A sorrowful pause fell on all around,
And Eben gave a sobbin' sound
As he wiped off his drippin' brow.

But Sol Smith says, in a doubtin' way—
"Of course, Eben, it's jest as you say,
But it's natteral to remember
That melons is apt to go to smash
When they meet with any kind of a crash,
And it's terrible hot in September."
That didn't feaze Eben; no, sirree!
He was jest as calm as a man could be.
Says he, "Wa'al, I'll hev ye to know
That when that melon flew over the wall
It didn't go to smash at all,
For it *lit in a bank of snow!*"



Helen Mason Grose

The Hearth Motto

The year was in the blooming
At flood of the Spring tide,
When I came down
To the old town,
Bringing my chosen bride.

And oh! but the world was merry,
For oh! but our hearts were young,
No day seemed long
For jest and song
Were ever upon the tongue.

Under the boughs of an orchard
Whose petals fluttered down
In a rosy foam
We made our home
In a cottage old and brown.

And we wrote across the hearth where we
Were beginning life together,
"Here shall ye see
No enemy
Save Winter and rough Weather."

And I said, "Dear wife, be it ever so,
For all, whether simple or grand,
Who enter here
Shall meet good cheer
And a welcome of heart and hand."

In the dusk of summer evenings
We sat on the latticed porch
Where the firefly
Went dancing by
Waving a fairy torch.

And we talked of the misty future,
Of wonderful things to be,
Of friendships long
And a love that was strong
For time and eternity.

And now the year's in the gloaming,
And Life's on the ebbing tide,
Dry leaves fall down
In the old town
Where I took my youthful bride.

Far from that hearth have we roamed and long
Have we traveled Life's road together;
By our fireside glow
There is still no foe
Save Winter and Rough Weather.

The Whistlin' Poet

Lord! how I wisht I could sing;
Sometimes when I'm down by the spring
Or plowin' the field,
Seems though I should bust!
I'm plumb full of it all—
The smell o' the earth, the blue o' the sky
And birds flyin' high,
It jest hurts!
And I feel 'bout the way the dumb critters look
When they're tryin' to tell ye what ails 'em.
I wisht I could sing like the brook,
But I cayn't do nothing but whistle.
I kin carry a tune but the words won't come,
Seems as if me and the critters was dumb
And I cayn't tell what I'm whistlin' about;
Lord who give me this feeling, oh help git it out!

Why thet's rhymin'—oh shucks! the idee!
How in thunder'd it happen to me,
I didn't mean to, it came,
Is thet the way, Lord?
Do ye mean it?
Why, I hain't hed but two terms o' schoolin',
Hed to work on the farm and quit foolin'
Ever since I was ten.
Never knew the time when
I wan't toilin'.
But every chanct I got at a book
'Twas allers the poetry ones I took,
And mebbe that's what's boilin' within me.

Why I feel like a swarm o' bees
Sailin' among the trees;
Don't know jest whar I shall light,
But feel jest ez ef I might
Settle down in a hive,
Sakes alive!

Kin I make poetry like honey?
Gather in the idees from the flowers,
Pack 'em down in the cells o' my brain
And send 'em streamin' again
Fit for nourishin' folks?
There 'tis again,
I cayn't sing, only whistle.
When I try to think of a rhyme
It flies from me every time
Jest like a bird that you're chasin', somehow
Allers flies off to a different bough,
I'll hev ter be a Whistlin' Poet!
Ef the tune is all right
The words ain't so needful,
Not quite!

Of course 'taint likely I shall be
A poet like Shakespeare or Riley—jest me.
Folks hev to write about what they know,
Men cayn't talk about winter thet never seen snow.
And what other folks like to hear, they say,
Is the things thet don't happen to them every day.
I'm so full of it all—the birds and the bees
And the strength o' the hills—
I know I kin please
In tellin' o' these

If I only kin whistle the tune.
And Lord! you're right in it,
Thar isn't a day
Thet I don't open my eyes an' say
"I'm watchin' the Lord an' his glory,
The fields tell his wonderful story,"
And my thoughts rise right up to the mountain
Seekin' the heavenly fountain
Of life on the summit.

Oh Lord, if I find I kin tell
Of the things you hev made
And the places wherein you do dwell,
Ye'll know, Lord, I thank ye
For helpin' me tell 'em.
And I'm glad I'm jest me.
Now Shakespeare or Milton and Riley maybe
Must allers be buried beneath a stone
Somewhere in a crowd and never alone.
Now ez for me I want to lie
In some place under the open sky.
In a pasture mebbe where mosses foam
And children pick berries to carry home.
And p'raps right over my peaceful breast
Some little sparrer will build her nest.
And on the headstone they'll write may be,
"The Whistlin' Poet—Jonas Green"—thet's me!

Chums Yet

There were so many things he didn't know,
My boyhood chum of the long ago,
That except on one day of seven
I had to teach him, because, you see,
He was only a boy of thirty-three
And I was a man of eleven.

On Sundays he left me in lurch
When he went to preach in the village church,
And talk to folks about Heaven.
'Twas Heaven the rest of the week to me
When I played with my chum of thirty-three,
And taught him the lore of eleven.

I showed him how to dig for bait
And where the berries ripened late
Against an old stone wall;
The black snake's hole, the king-bird's nest,
The swimming pool I liked the best,
Hemmed in by alders tall.

We sailed and fished upon the bay,
Tramped through the fields and raked the hay
Or drove the country over;
And while he made his parish calls
I grass-greened my clean overalls
Rolling among the clover.

Somehow I never seemed to see
That he was really teaching *me,*
So gentle was his guile;
For he would say, "Of course you know
That such a thing is so and so,
You've known it all the while."

Of course a fellow had to do
Just what he said to *make* it true.
So if he thought me good,
Why, hang it all, I *had* to be;
Though if I failed I knew that he
Never misunderstood.

Still on through all my college days
There came his helpful note of praise
To aid my least endeavor;
And now in all my manhood prime
That friendship of a boyhood time
Nor years nor space can sever.

I love him now as I loved him then,
He is still the wisest and best of men
That dwells in Earth or Heaven;
He's as blithe in spirit, it seems to me,
As when he was a lad of thirty-three
And I was a man of eleven.

Memorial Day

Back in the town, the old, old town, the town where I
was born,
Some gray-haired men are carrying a faded flag this
morn.

And groups of eager children from all the country
side
Are bringing wreaths of flowers gathered from far and
wide.

Down through the village street they pass with muffled
fife and drum,
"Fall in! Atttention, Comrades! Brothers, again we
come."

Under the elms and maples fresh foliaged by
May
Out to the quiet graveyard slowly they take their
way.

And today my thoughts turn backward half a century
of years,
I see the low beamed sitting room, I see my mother's
tears.

The purring cat, the hearth rug, and I remember
still
A pot of flowers blooming upon the window
sill.

I hear the sound of weeping and the solemn tock-tick-tock
Of the pendulum slow swinging in the old eight day clock.

Too young to tell the time I was, yet knew the moment when
The creeping hands moved slowly and stood at half-past ten.

That marked the hour of parting and the stage was at the door
To take my elder brothers off to something they called War.

Sturdy and tall, and handsome, they stood there, shoulder to shoulder,
One of them was just fourteen, the other one year older.

Proud and excited they chattered, eager and ready to start,
Men they were in stature, but boys, mere boys, at heart.

And none of us knew who stood there watching the gallant scene
That one would come back to his mother—dead—and not yet sixteen.

He fell in the battle at Newbern, ah! but the end was sweet,
For he gave his life to Freedom and died ere he knew Defeat.

Under the elms and maples sound the low fife and drum,
"Forward! Attention, Comrades! Brothers, again we come."